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California State University, Monterey Bay
Social and Behavioral Sciences: Sociology

Immigrant Students: Attitudes and Perceptions Towards Education.

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Abstract

This research studied the attitudes and perceptions towards education in foreign-born and first-generation immigrant students enrolled at California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB). Data was collected through an online survey that used original questions by the researcher as well as modified questions from The Center for Applied Research in Education, and the *2004 National Survey of Latinos: Education* (PHC, 2004). Concepts from the Cultural Ecological Theory developed by John Ogbu were applied to this project as it explores the academic performance among immigrant students (voluntary minority). According to Ogbu, voluntary minorities have a pragmatic and optimistic attitude towards schooling (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). The study identified the students' demographics, academic performance, and attitudes and perceptions towards education. On average, foreign-born and first-generation immigrant students have positive attitudes and perceptions towards education with slight differences. Data suggest that participants, especially first-generation, are critical to the challenges faced by the immigrant community including language barriers, legal status, economic status, inexperienced teachers, lack of school funding, and lack of programs aimed at immigrant students. Traits of resilience were found in the participants' response to schooling.

Keywords: immigrant, foreign born, first-generation, students, education, attitudes, perceptions.

Introduction

This is a study of attitudes and perceptions towards education between foreign-born and first-generation immigrant students attending California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) in the Monterey County in California, United States. The project was set out to explore the following research questions: 1) What are attitudes and perceptions towards education between foreign-born and the first-generation immigrant students? 2) What are the main differences in attitudes and perceptions towards education between foreign-born and first-generation CSUMB immigrant students? and 3) To what extent does Ogbu's definition of voluntary group (immigrants) applicable to the characteristics found in foreign-born and first-generation immigrant students attending CSUMB?

Data was collected through an online survey in a period of two weeks. It was open to all current CSUMB foreign-born and first-generation immigrant students regardless of their undergraduate or graduate status, academic year, race/ethnicity, gender, age, place of birth, and income. Foreign-born immigrant students are those who were born outside the United States and moved to the United States to live permanently. The term first-generation immigrant students refers to those students who were born in the United States to foreign-born immigrant parents (Kao & Tienda, 1995). The online survey included original questions by the researcher as well as modified questions from The Center for Applied Research in Education, and the 2004 National Survey of Latinos: *Education* (PHC, 2004). The study included questions on the students' demographics, Grade Point Average (GPA), discrimination, challenges, English proficiency, and attitudes and perceptions towards education. Participants were provided with the following definitions: perceptions are a personal interpretation towards the environment, and attitudes are

understood as a mental predisposition that influences the students' response to schooling. The survey was elaborated to explore the research questions as well as to identify the characteristics of the immigrant community at CSUMB in relation to the concept of voluntary minorities developed in the Cultural Ecological Theory by John Ogbu (Ogbu & Simon, 1998).

To understand the implications of the findings of this study, concepts from the Cultural Ecological (CE) Theory by John Ogbu were applied to this project. This theory explores the academic performance of minority students by focusing on the dominant patterns of behavior of this group. Ogbu proposed that the students' academic performance is influenced by two factors: 1) The way society treats minority students (the system), and 2) The minority students' response to the system (community forces). Ogbu identified the study of the community forces as the study of the minority students' perceptions towards education. The community forces are influenced by the typology of the students: voluntary (immigrants by choice), involuntary (groups that were conquered, displaced, or enslaved), and autonomous (unsubordinated small groups). This study focused on the voluntary group only. According to Ogbu, voluntary minorities have a pragmatic and optimistic attitude towards schooling. One of the dominant patterns of behavior found in voluntary groups is their strong commitment to educational success in spite of cultural, linguistic, and economic barriers (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Ogbu's theory is relevant to this study as it provides a framework to understand the attitudes and perceptions of immigrant students (voluntary minority). It also helps to identify the dominant patterns of behavior that lead to either academic achievement or underachievement.

This project is relevant at three different levels. From the perspective of the discipline, that is, the study of the field of education in the social sciences, I believe that there has been

insufficient scrutiny over the relationship between the generational status and academic performance in immigrant students. Ogbu & Simons (1998) suggest that the typology of the students does not guarantee academic achievement or underachievement, but it helps understanding why students adopt certain patterns of behavior in the classroom. This study also explores the meaning society gives to the word “immigration,” and how it is perceived by foreign-born and first-generation immigrant students. Socially, this study is aimed at providing justification and encouragement to programs intended to promote higher academic achievement among the immigrant community. In the following section, I present the reader with an overview of pertinent literature to provide context to this research.

Literature Review/Theory

To understand the different attitudes and perceptions of immigrant students it is important to take into consideration the cultural context of the communities these students are immersed. This is clearly established in the work of John Ogbu and the development of the tenets of the Cultural Ecological Theory. In order to operationalize the project it is similarly critical to explore the current understanding on the best ways to identify attitudes among minority students.

Cultural Context

The topic of immigration is highly controversial. In September 2015, immigration ranked number third most important issue facing this nation today (Gallup, 2015). In addition to the lack of popularity towards immigration, the immigrant community faces unique challenges like cultural assimilation and academic success. These factors leave members of this community in precarious situations (Stevens, 2011). In general, high school dropouts and levels of college completion show that Latinos, including immigrants and U.S. born, have a lower academic

achievement than Caucasians (PHC, 2004). Suarez-Orozco suggests that some foreign immigrant students outperform first-generation immigrant students in spite of language barriers. In some instances, the latter accomplishes higher academic achievement while the foreign born show high dropout rates (2001).

In 2014, out of the 42.4 million immigrants living in the United States, more than 840,000 were students and 4.6 million English learners (MPI, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Estimates suggest that “as many as one in every five school children is an immigrant” and within a decade, one in four students will be English Student Learners across the country (Van Rockel, 2008; Stevens, 2011). Even though immigrant students from Latin America are the fastest growing group in the nation, their voices in research often remain silent (Brown, 2014; McCloud, 2015; Strickland, 2012).

McCloud states that “here is clearly a need for alternative paradigms that value and affirm the rich, diverse experiences of immigrant youth” (2015). Immigrant students face challenges in the classroom that native students do not. These challenges include cultural barriers, limited English proficiency, and non-citizenship status that complicate efforts towards academic excellence and shape the students’ attitudes towards education (McCloud, 2015; PHC, 2004). Since attitudes and perceptions influence human behavior, it is important to analyze what causes them and what is their effect on the student academic performance. It could be done by analyzing the students’ environment and patterns of behavior.

John Ogbu’s Cultural Ecological Theory

John Ogbu developed the Cultural-Ecological Theory to explain the relationship between the environment and patterns of behavior towards school performance in minority students (Foster, 2004; Hayes, 1992; Ogbu & Simons, 1998). This theory leading frameworks are:

1. System and Community Forces.
2. Typology of students: Voluntary, Involuntary, and Autonomous minorities.
3. Gaps in education among different learning centers.
4. Minority students create strategies for survival/adaptive behavior (Foster, 2004).

First Framework. To understand what leads to students' academic success or failure it is important to analyze the social context and the factors that influence school performance within the members of this community. Ogbu identified two factors: 1) The System, and 2) Community Forces. According to Ogbu, the system refers to how do the dominant society treats minority groups. Community Forces refers to the minorities' response towards education and how they respond to the way they are treated by the dominant society (Foster, 2004; Hayes, 1992; Ogbu & Simons, 1998). The dynamics of the system and the community forces can be understood by looking at the social dynamics between the student and the teacher.

In the classroom, gender, ethnicity, and race are relevant variables in teacher behavior (Constantine & Gushe, 2003). According to different data, students' and teachers' ethnicity influence the way students perceive their professors as well as the student's attitudes towards education. A few studies conducted in the 1980's found that White students were treated better than non-white students in the same classroom. As a result, Black-Americans were more likely to receive negative and non-academic feedback than their White peers (As cited in den Bock & Levy, 2005). In a more recent study, students with limited English proficiency perceived more

dominance from teachers than their classmates who were fluent in the language. A later study supported that immigrant students observed a decrease on teacher's dominance over time.

According to den Brok and Levy, teacher's dominance over immigrant students is not necessarily negative. Because professors were aware of the students' cultural and linguistic challenges, they wanted to support ESL (English as Second Language) students in adapting themselves to the new social and academic environments (2005).

The teacher-expectation phenomenon has been studied as means to understand students' academic performance. Research suggested that students can recognize the way teachers perceived them through oral communication and body language (Rubie-Davies, 2006). Low teacher expectations in the classroom are linked to low academic performance among students. When students perceive professors to be easy on them, they are less likely to become active agents of their learning (Cohen, 2012). Rubie-Davies studied the relationship between students' academic performance and teacher's expectations. At the beginning of the school year, Rubie-Davies collected information on students' self-perceptions and teachers' academic views towards their students. The research included six professors who were identified as having different academic expectations towards their students. The professors had been designated as 1) high-expectation teachers, 2) average-progress teachers, and 3) low-expectation teachers. As part of this research, the students were asked to rate the degree in which they believed their professors perceived them. At the end of the school year, those students whose professors had high expectations of them, in average, did better in school than the students who were perceived as low achievers by their professors. When data was first collected, it showed no difference in the

students' academic performance in mathematics and writing (2006). It suggested that student behavior (community forces) is influenced by the way teachers (system) perceive the students.

Second Framework. Voluntary minorities include minority groups who immigrated to a foreign country by choice; generally, in search of better academic and economic opportunities. Even if they experience discrimination, this group's primary goal is to achieve academic success. They are willing to accept and adapt to the new society's mainstream norms. In contrast, involuntary minorities are those who are in the United States as a result of colonization, slavery, and misplacement. Two essential characteristics of involuntary minorities are they often oppose to the country's foreign institution and struggle to adapt to the mainstream society. As a result of past discrimination by dominant groups, the involuntary minority group maintains different patterns of behavior in opposition to the majority group. These various modes of behavior are based on cultural and language differences. The main difference between voluntary and involuntary minorities is that the former is more likely to do well in school while the latter often experiences academic failure. Differences in school performance are based on students' behavior, attitudes towards education, and social context (Hayes, 1992; Ogbu & Simons, 1998). The last group, autonomous minorities, "may have a distinctive racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic or cultural identity... but are not subordinated groups" (As cited in Foster, 2004). This research focused on voluntary (immigrant) minorities only.

Third Framework. Ogbu stated that primary and secondary differences distinguished minority groups from members of the dominant groups. Primary differences include disagreements between the student's language, cultural norms, and the school's language standards. Voluntary minorities are less likely to perceive secondary cultural differences and to

be successful. Secondary cultural differences include opposition to the mainstream culture as a result of perceived discrimination against them. To protect their identity, minority students' rely on alternative cultural and linguistic practices that lead to academic failure. Ogbu believed that both voluntary and involuntary minorities share primary differences. However, involuntary minorities are more likely to build up to secondary cultural differences which jeopardize their odds to succeed in school and the larger community (Foster, 2004; Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Fourth Framework. Members of the involuntary minority group may adopt survival strategies that undermine academic success. These involve: 1) clientship/Uncle Tomming, 2) collective struggle, and 3) hustling. The first strategy refers to ways of behavior which include patronage or favoritism to achieve higher status and the imitation of members of the dominant group. The second one involves forms of collective action that could lead to increased opportunities available for members of minority groups. The last survival strategy is linked to behavior that encourages a reverse work ethic (Foster, 2004).

Cultural Ecological Theory explains that differences in language and culture can lead to conflict in the classroom. When minority students come to class, their ability to perform well in school is limited by the lack of understanding towards the U.S. values and the English language. However, it does not guarantee academic failure as the students' response to their environment does. Based on Ogbu's theory, immigrant students who decided to move to a foreign country in search of better academic and social opportunities, are more likely to overcome a variety of challenges and succeed. In contrast, those who immigrated by force or displacement, tend to reject U.S. American values towards education and rely on strategies for survival. The students'

attitudes towards education and the larger society play a significant role on the student's academic performance (Foster, 2004; Hayes, 1992; Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Attitudes Towards Education in Latino/Hispanic Immigrant Students

Henerson, Morris, and, Fitz-Gibbon (1987) defined attitudes as a learned predisposition to respond positively or negatively towards the environment. Attitudes result from previous experiences, expectations of others, and anticipation of consequences (Henerson, Morris, and Fitz-Gibbon, 1987). A student who often faces challenges in school will be more likely to develop negative feelings towards education. These feelings will lead to low academic performance or the opposite. People's attitudes towards education can be measured by administering a scaled survey that allows students to provide their views on the school system and academic challenges. Measuring the students' attitudes towards education is important because when the life experiences of this community are ignored, it is hard to identify the causes of academic failure (Stevens, 2011).

Data from the *2004 National Survey of Latinos: Education* show that immigrants and non-immigrant Latinos perceived education as a top concern within their community. On the same manner, Latinos show strong faith towards the school system and willingness to take responsibility towards their children's' academic success. Immigrant Latinos showed the greatest positive attitudes and sense of optimism towards education among Blacks, Whites, and U.S. born Latinos. Also, immigrant Latinos believe that school should teach English to immigrant students as well as help them retain their native language (PHC, 2004).

In average, most Latino immigrant students have positive attitudes towards education (Cohen, 2011; McCloud, 2015; Oikonomiday, 2015; Suarez et. al., 2010). However, data suggest

that external and internal factors prevent students from getting an optimal education. The external factors include language barriers, family support, academic support, and interactions with peers. It seems like these elements, more than attitudes towards education, have the greatest effects on immigrant students' academic performance (Cohen, 2011; McCloud, 2011; Stevens, 2011; Strickland, 2012).

Methodology

By administering an online survey questionnaire, this study examined the attitudes and perceptions towards education between foreign-born and first-generation immigrant students enrolled in CSUMB. Subjects were current CSUMB, undergraduate or graduate, foreign-born or first-generation immigrant students from all academic levels, race/ethnicity, gender, age, place of birth, and income. This study originally intended to be inclusive of all immigrants. Since the majority of the CSUMB student population is of Latino descent (39%), this study primarily focuses on Latino immigrant students to the United States (IAR, 2016). The survey took place in the Monterey County, California, from October 18 to the 31st, 2016. The online server *eSurvey Creator* was used to distribute the instrument of research among prospective participants.

Demographics

Sixteen surveys out of the original 77 were deleted because the participants either decided to withdraw or did not identify themselves as foreign-born or first-generation immigrant students. No data from the deleted surveys (16) was included in this research project. The total sample included 61 eligible participants. Based on the definitions provided in the survey questionnaire, participants informed if they were foreign-born immigrant students (n= 25, 40.8%) or born in the United States to immigrant parents (first-generation) (n= 36, 59.01%). The

ethnic composition of the total sample was Hispanic or Latino (n=52, 85.24%), Asian (n=4, 6.5%), White (n=2, 3.27%), Native American (n=1, 1.63%), other (n=2, 3.27%). Most participants were female (n=46, 75.41%), between ages 21-24 (n=33, 54.1%), third year in college or junior (n=21, 34.42%), and had a GPA between 3.5 and 4.0 (n=23, 37.70%). Because a sample of convenience was used, generalizations should be made cautiously.

Instrument

The survey questionnaire included original questions by the researcher as well as questions retrieved from The Center for Applied Research in Education, and the *2004 National Survey of Latinos: Education* conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center (PHC, 2004). In 2004, the Pew Hispanic Center conducted the *National Survey of Latinos: Education* to measure the Latino attitudes towards education, public schools, and other educational issues. The survey was divided into two main sections: 1) Attitudes towards Education and Assessment of Schools Today, and 2) Views on Politics and Policy. Questions retrieved from the Pew Hispanic Center survey were slightly modified to fit with the demographics of this group as suggested by participants who tested the survey.

An experimental treatment was administered among a small sample of participants to avoid any possible errors (Table 1.1). Once it was tested and approved, an email with a link to the final survey questionnaire was sent to a sample of convenience. Participants were informed about the objective of this research. The concepts of attitude and perception were also defined. They knew their participation in this study was voluntary, confidential, and anonymous. They knew that no incentives would be provided if they consented to take part in this study by

answering the survey questionnaire. Participants were asked to select the statement in which they identified the most and knew they could withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind.

Pilot		
Participant # 1	Participant #2	Participant #3
Q. #12 & 18 Awkward wording	Q. #9 Add casual or formal conversation	Q. #9 Be more specific
Q. #16 Add more options (challenges)	Q. #2 Be gender inclusive	Q. #12 It is not clear
	Q. #18 Awkward wording	Q. # 14 Describe "school official"

Table 1.1 Table of Suggestions

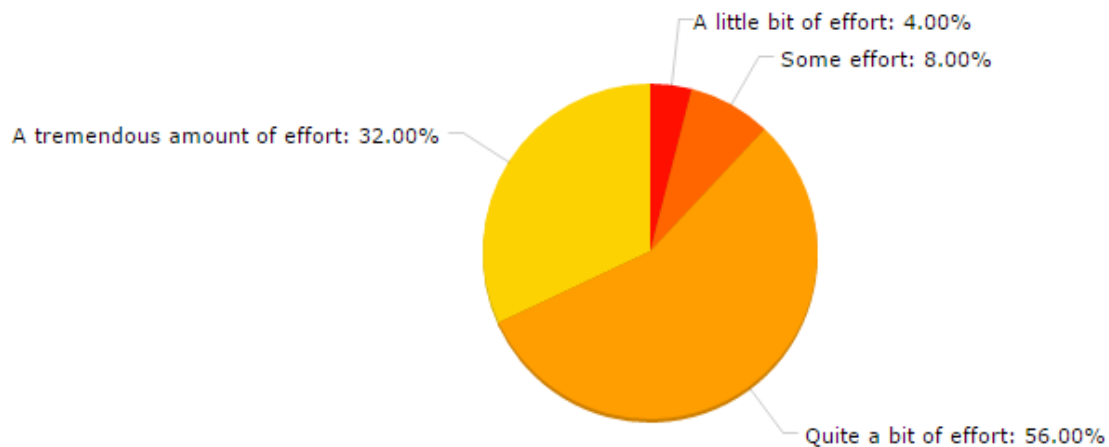
The survey was composed of 26 questions aim to identify the students' demographics, Grade Point Average (GPA), immigrant status, English proficiency, challenges, discrimination, and attitudes and perceptions towards education. The survey comprised twenty-five, closed-ended questions including dichotomous, multiple-choice, and scaled questions. The last section included one open-ended question aimed to provide participants a platform to express themselves. Participants were encouraged to share personal experiences and opinions towards the topic of immigrants in education. The function word cloud by NVIVO was used to identify keywords. Because responses were small in length, key themes and trends found among participants were coded by hand. The following section explores in detail the answers provided by the participants.

Analysis

This section explores the dominant traits found in CSUMB foreign-born and first-generation immigrant students in relation to their immigration status, demographics, GPA, English proficiency, discrimination, challenges, perceptions, and attitudes towards education.

Foreign Born Immigrant Students

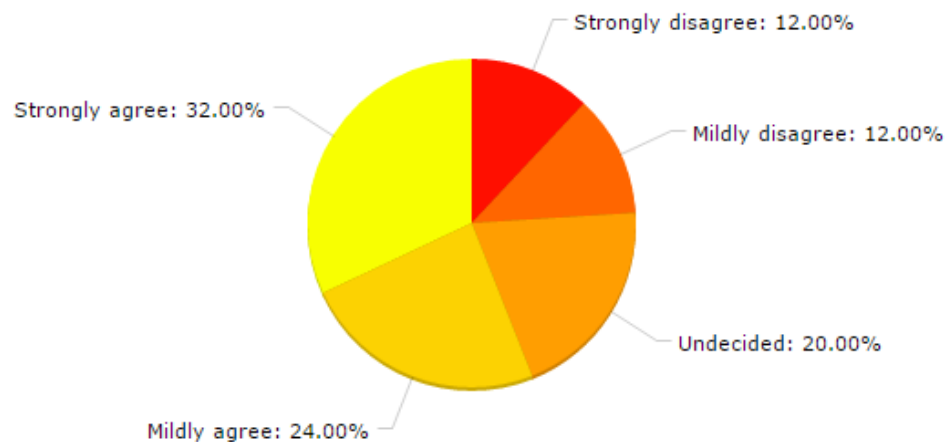
A total sample of 40.8% of participants identified themselves as foreign-born immigrant students. A 76% (n=19) of the surveyed population said that it was not their decision to move from their country of origin to the United States. The survey did not include questions to explore the factors that contributed to their immigration from one country to another. Within this group most participants were of Latin or Hispanic descent (n=20, 80%), female (n=15, 60%), and between the ages 21 to 24 (n=14, 56%). Most participants are senior in college (n=10, 40%). A 36% (n=9) of foreign-born immigrant students have a GPA that falls between 3.1 and 3.5, and those who have a GPA between 3.6 and 4.0 make up to 24% (n=7) of the total sample. Most participants (n=23, 92%) said that it is very important for them to get a college education. The majority of foreign-born immigrant students (n=14, 56%) said they put quite a bit of effort into their academic work while 32% (n=8) put a tremendous amount of effort. Only 4% (n=1) said they put a little bit of effort (See Graphic 1.1).



Graphic 1.1 Percentage of respondents by Academic Effort Perceived.

A total of 64% (n=16) of participants said they can carry a casual conversation in English very well. When participants were asked how well they can carry a formal conversation in English, the percentage of students who said very well went down to 48% (n=12). Most foreign-

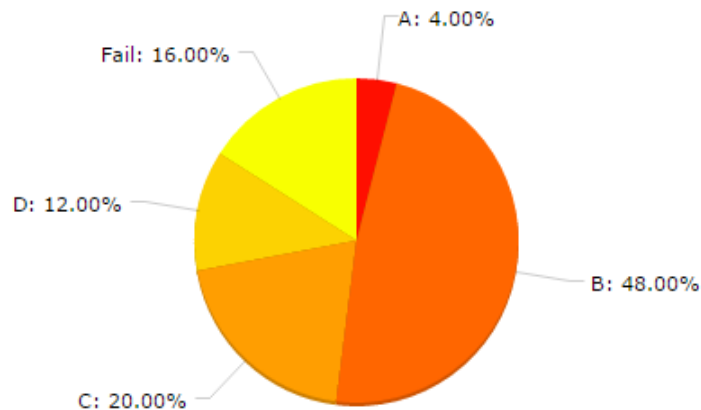
born immigrant students (n=12, 48%) believe that public schools do an effective job teaching English to members of their community. A 96% (n=24) of participants said that immigrant students face challenges in education while a 4% (n=1) said otherwise. When asked to rank problems facing immigrant students today in order of importance, 41.67% (n=10) of students said that language barriers are the most important issue followed by legal status (n=7, 29.17%) and cultural barriers (n=7, 29.17%). When it comes to personal experiences, 56% (n=14) mildly or strongly agreed they have experienced discrimination in schools while 24% (n=6) mildly or strongly disagree. 60% (n=15) of first generation immigrant students said there is a lot of discrimination against immigrants (See graphic 1.2).



Graphic 1.2 Percentage of respondents by Perceived Discrimination Against Immigrants.

A 64% (n=16) of participants perceived that their teachers have a good understanding of their academic strengths and weaknesses in comparison to 36% (n=9) who perceive the opposite. Most participants (n=13, 52%) perceived previous experiences they have had with school counselors and teachers as somewhat good. Followed by 40% (n=10) of participants who perceived past experiences as very good, and 8% (n=2) as not too good. Most participants in this

group (n=12, 48%) graded the public school at their communities with a “B.” In comparison, 20% (n=5) graded them with a “C,” 16% (n=4) would fail the performance of the public schools at their community, and only 4% (n=1) graded them with an “A” (See Graphic 1.3).

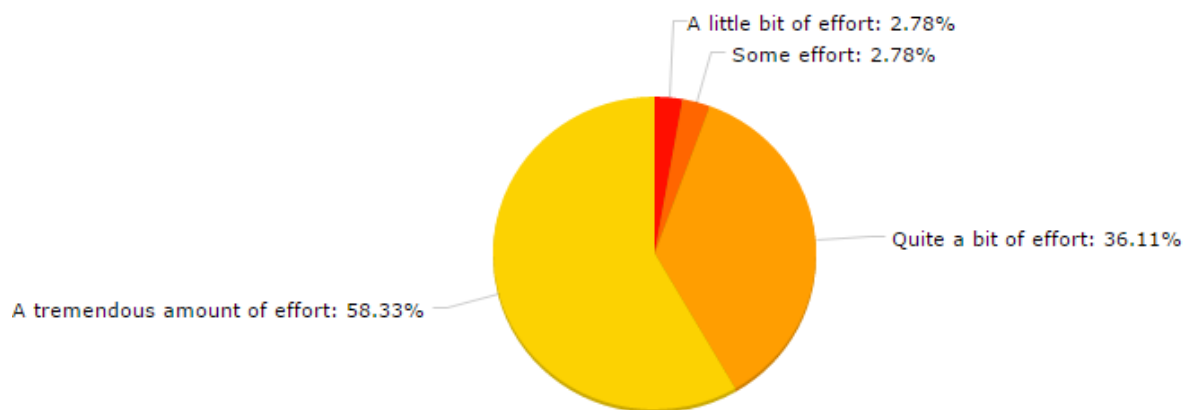


Graphic 1.3 Percentage of respondents by Evaluation of Public Schools.

A 64% (n=16) of foreign-born immigrant students mildly or strongly agreed school has been a pleasant experience to them. An 82% (n= 18) of participants said they look forward to going to most of their classes. When asked if they were reluctant to participate in most class discussions, 48% (n=12) of students agreed, and 16% (n=4) said they were undecided. Out of the 48% (n=12) of students who stated that they are reluctant to participate in most class discussions, 58.3% (n=7) identified shyness as the main reason for them not to participate. At the end of the survey, students were asked to share any ideas or views on the topic of immigrants in education. The themes that foreign-born immigrant students mentioned the most were language barriers and perceptions towards school teachers.

First Generation Immigrant Students

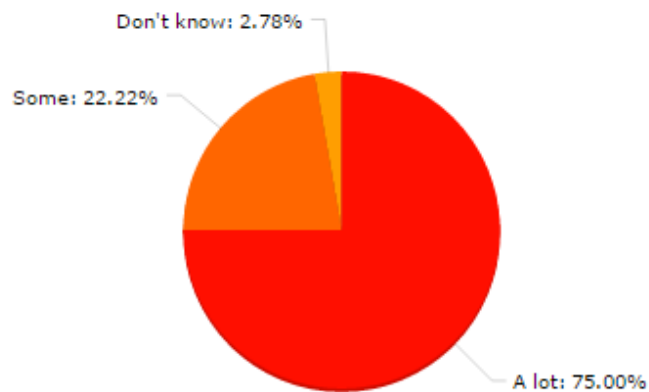
A total of 88.9% (n=32) of students under this group were of Hispanic or Latino descent, 86.1% (n=31) identify themselves as female, and 52.8% (n=19) were between ages 21 through 24. Most participants (n=15, 41.7%) in this group were third-year college students. The majority of students (n=16, 44.4%) said they have a GPA between 3.6 and 4.0 while 27.8% (10) have a GPA between 2.6 and 3.0. Most first generation immigrant students (n=21, 58.3%) said they put a tremendous amount of effort into their academic work while 36.1% (13) of them stated that they put quite a bit of effort (See Graphic 2.1).



Graphic 2.1 Percentage of respondents by Academic Effort Perceived

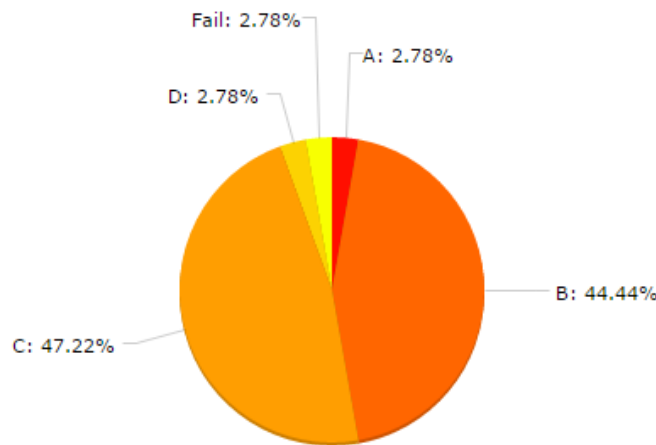
An 86.1% (n=31) of first-generation immigrant students said they can carry a casual conversation in English very well. This percentage went down to 61.1% (n=22) when asked how well can they carry a formal conversation in English. Based on the same question, 36.1% (n=13) said they can carry a formal conversation pretty well, and 2.8% (n=1) just a little. Most first generation immigrant students (n=21, 58.3%) perceived English classes in public schools to be fairly effective, 25% (n=9) said it is effective, and only a 5.6% (n=2) said it is very effective. When asked if immigrant students face challenges in education, all participants (n=36, 100%) said yes. A 30.56% (n=11) participants ranked language barriers as the most important problem

facing immigrant students today. A 27.78% (n=9) of them ranked money as the second most important issue, and 30.56% (n=11) rank racism/discrimination/prejudice/segregation as the third most important problem. A total of 52.8% (n=19) of students mildly or strongly agreed they have experienced discrimination in school, 22.2% (n=8) disagree, and 25% (n=9) are undecided. Most first generation immigrant students (n=27, 75%) said there is a lot of discrimination against immigrants (See Graphic 2.2).



Graphic 2.2 Percentage of respondents by Perceived Discrimination Against Immigrants

When asked if teachers have a good understanding of their academic strengths and weaknesses, 50% (n=18) said yes, and the other half said no. Most members of this groups (n=20, 55.6%) said they would rate their experiences with school officials as somewhat good, in comparison to 34% (n=14) who said their experiences had been very good. When participants were asked what grade they would give to public schools in their communities, 47.2% (n=17) said they would grade them with a “C” while 44.4% (n=16) would grade their local school with a “B.” Only 2.8% (n=1) say they will grade public schools with an “A”(See Graphic 2.3).



Graphic 2.3 Percentage of respondents by Evaluation of Public Schools.

A 69.4% (n=25) mildly or strongly agreed school has been a pleasant experience, and only 8.4% (3) strongly or mildly disagreed. An 83.3% (n=30) said they look forward to going to most to their classes while only 2.8% (n=1) strongly disagreed. When asked if they are reluctant to participate in most class discussions, 38.9% (n=14) mildly or strongly disagreed while 47.2% (n=17) mildly or strongly agreed. Out of 47.2%, (n=8) of those who are unwilling to participate in class said it is due to shyness, while 23.5% (n=4) said it is a result of cultural barriers. The main themes that came up from the open question were language barriers, school programs, and lack of funding.

Findings

Even if they experienced challenges in education, foreign born and first generation immigrant students enrolled in CSUMB have positive attitudes and perceptions towards education with little to no differences. These variances are based on the students' GPA, views on discrimination, and perceptions towards teachers and the educational system. Based on John Ogbu's Cultural Ecological Theory, characteristics of voluntary minorities (immigrants) were

found in the foreign-born and first-generation immigrant students attending CSUMB. In the following section, I identify the dominant traits of foreign-born and first-generation immigrant students and its relevance to the concept of voluntary minorities (immigrants).

Foreign Born Immigrant Students

Foreign-born immigrant students consider getting a college education to be very important. This group's good academic performance is reflected in their overall GPA. When it comes to discrimination, most members say there is discrimination against immigrant students and most than half of the participants reported being discriminated against in school at some point in their lives. They also identified language barriers, legal status, and cultural barriers as issues affecting the immigrant community today. However, their overall perceptions and attitudes towards education are positive. As an example, most foreign-born immigrant students graded the academic performance of public schools with the letter grade "B." In average, most participants reported that school has been a pleasant experience and mentioned they look forward to going to most of their classes. When students were asked if they are reluctant to participate in most class discussions, almost half of the student sample said yes. Shyness was identified as the main reason for foreign-born immigrant students to avoid participating in class discussions. It suggests that discrimination and language barriers do not determine the academic performance among foreign-born immigrant students. In addition, they show resilient behaviors and some expressed pride of their immigrant status.

First Generation Immigrant Students

First generation immigrant students perceive getting a college education as very important. Even if all participants in this group were born in the United States, a 60% of them

reported being able to speak formal English very well. Data show that most first generation immigrant students put high levels of effort into their school assignments and have a GPA among 3.6 and 4.0. Even if no participant said that there is no discrimination against immigrant students, half of them reported being discriminated against in academic institutions. They also think that family members who are foreign-born immigrants are more likely to be discriminated against than immigrants born in the United States. For first generation immigrant students, the most important challenges in order of importance facing the immigrant community are language barriers, money, and discrimination/prejudice. They are also critical towards academic institutions and teachers. Based on their answers, they think that school funding and inexperienced teachers are weaknesses within our educational system. However, this group reported looking forward to attending most classes.

Differences Between Voluntary Minorities (Immigrants)

According to John Ogbu, voluntary minorities (immigrants) have a “pragmatic attitude towards school” that motivates them to do well in school in spite of academic challenges (Ogbu & Simon, 1998, pg.182). One of the main differences found between foreign born and first generation immigrant students was academic performance and GPA. Ogbu suggested that immigrant students who are more distant in culture and language from public school tend to do better. However, data show that first-generation immigrant students are more likely to put a tremendous amount of effort into their academic work. It explains why most members of this group have a higher GPA than their counterparts. In comparison, most foreign-born immigrant students say they put quite a bit of effort into their academic work and, in average, have a GPA between 3.1 and 3.5. The change in academic effort and GPA could also be explained by their

ability to understand English and therefore, the class material. In average, foreign-born immigrant students are less proficient in English than first generation immigrant students. However, both groups consider themselves to be proficient in the English language.

Based on the survey results, all first generation immigrant students agree there is discrimination against immigrant students even if they are less likely than foreign-born immigrant students to experience discrimination. When it comes to education, first generation immigrant students tend to be more critical of the performance of public schools in their communities. As an example, the first generation shows a greater concern about the lack of school funding for minority groups as well as the lack of programs aimed at foreign-born immigrant students. On top of that, they consider that many students are not provided with the needed academic support as well as financial aid to succeed in school. In contrast, data suggest that foreign-born immigrant students have more positive perceptions towards education for the following reasons. Members of this group are more likely to grade public schools with higher scores, say that teachers have a good understanding of their academic strengths and weaknesses, and perceive English classes as effective in contrast to first generation immigrant students who perceive English classes to be fairly effective. However, the latter is more likely to look forward to attending most of their classes and participating in most class discussions.

Ogbu also suggested that among voluntary minorities, more recent immigrant are less likely to perceive discrimination and to mistrust the educational system than those who had lived in the United States for a longer period. In addition, voluntary minorities have a “positive dual frame of reference” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, pg. 170). It means that immigrant students tend to compare and contrast their current situation in the U.S. to their situation “back home” (Ogbu &

Simons, 1998, pg. 170). Also, I suggest that Latino foreign-born immigrant students are less likely to be critical of the U.S. educational system, at least until they developed a greater understanding towards the educational system, because of ideas related to the American Dream that tends to portray the U.S. as the country for opportunity. Foreign-born immigrant students' early acquisition of cultural earned behavior and the English language can result in being more critical towards the educational system.

Conclusion

The main objective of this research was to identify the attitudes and perceptions towards education among CSUMB immigrant students as well as the main differences between foreign-born and first-generation. The Cultural Ecological Theory developed by John Ogbu was applied to this research as it aims to study the academic performance among minority groups. The concept of voluntary groups (immigrants) was used to identify dominant patterns of behavior among immigrant students. According to Ogbu, voluntary minorities (immigrants) have positive views towards education and tend to do well in school. This characteristic of voluntary minorities was found in immigrant students attending CSUMB. According to the collection of data, foreign born and first generation immigrant students have positive attitudes and perceptions towards education with little to no differences. The main differences found between these two groups were related to the students' GPA, perceptions towards the educational system, and views on discrimination. Most first-generation immigrant students (44.4%) reported having a GPA among 3.6 and 4.0 in comparison to 28% of foreign-born immigrant students. The former is more likely to be critical towards the lack of academic support aimed at immigrant students and to perceive discrimination among immigrant students. Data suggest that foreign-born immigrant

students are more positive in their perceptions towards schooling, and they are in good academic standing. It is important to take into consideration that all participants were enrolled in an institution of higher education during the collection of data. It could explain why most participants showed positive attitudes and perceptions towards education. Future research should be done on this topic as this project only represents a small sample of the immigrant community at CSUMB. It would also be important to study the views on education among younger voluntary minorities.

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TIMELINE

1. IntroductionFebruary, 2016
2. Literature Review/ Theory.....September, 2016
3. Data Collection Process.....October, 2016
4. Data Analysis Process.....November, 2016
5. Interpretation of Findings.....November-December, 2016

